

King James' Wedding and Other Rhymes

J. Sands

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To George Kinmont

From his Friend.

William Johnston.

Wishing him a Happy Christmas.

And a Prosperous New Year.



Dec 21st 1908

KING JAMES' WEDDING

AND OTHER RHYMES

T. BUNCLE, PRINTER, ARBROATH



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Frontispiece

KING JAMES' WEDDING

AND OTHER RHYMES

BY

J. SANDS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

CHARLES KEENE, HARRY CHRISTIE, ETC.

A R B R O A T H : T. B U N C L E

1888



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P R E F A C E .

SHOULD any reader ask me why
I write in rhyme, I would reply
In our Scotch manner with a query :
Why do the birds when sad or cheery
Sit on the branches or the twigs
And pipe laments or whistle jigs ?
Why does the lark on flutt'ring wing
Soar to the clouds and joyful sing ?
And wherefore does the nightingale
In darkness chaunt his mournful tale ?
Because these birds by day and night
In making music take delight :
And as with them so 'tis with me,
I feel a joy in melody ;
And therefore sometimes sweeten time
By putting fancies into rhyme.

And should the gentle reader hint
That though I rhyme I need not print,
To him this answer I would give,—
That for ourselves we cannot live,
And in retirement though we be
We hanker still for sympathy ;
And if we get no approbation,
Are glad of hate and detestation.
The birds when warbling on the trees,
Though pleased themselves, would others please ;
The trumpet-note of chanticleer
He sounds that other cocks may hear,
And if he thought none heard his call
Perhaps he would not crow at all.

And I must ask why spinning rhyme
Should be regarded as a crime ?
And why the act of publication
Should be esteemed an aggravation,
Which stirs the surly critic's bile
And makes the biggest blockhead smile ?
Or why the suitors of the Muses
Should be required to make excuses,

And blame the friends who had advised them
To print the pieces that surprised them,
And which to them appeared as good
As those of Milton, Scott, or Hood ?

As for myself, I must confess
I sent my verses to the press
And am responsible alone
For every subject, verse, and tone ;
And if they fail to bring me fame,
My friends at least are not to blame :
Though no advice I got, to two
My very hearty thanks are due,
For making pictures none can scorn
My little volume to adorn.

J. S.

WALLS, SHETLAND, *June 1, 1888.*



C O N T E N T S .

	Page
KING JAMES' WEDDING—CANTO I., - - - - -	1
“ “ “ —CANTO II., - - - - -	5
“ “ “ —CANTO III., - - - - -	9
“ “ “ —NOTES TO, - - - - -	13
<i>Two Illustrations by Charles Keene ('C. K.' of 'Punch').</i>	
ADDRESS TO THE SUN. Written whilst working amongst Relics of Solar Worship, - - - - -	16
ADDRESS TO THE EARTH, - - - - -	18
WEDDING RINGS, - - - - -	22
<i>Illustration by Charles Keene.</i>	
SONG OF THE SHETLAND LASS, - - - - -	24
<i>Three Illustrations: two by Charles Keene and one by Harry Christie.</i>	
THE SEVEN HUNTERS; OR, FLANNAN ISLES, - - - - -	27
“ “ “ “ “ —NOTE TO, - - - - -	29
ADDRESS TO A MOUSE, which had Mangled a Volume of Burns' Poems published in 1794, - - - - -	31
LOBSTERS AND NATIONS, - - - - -	33
THE DAW IN BORROWED PLUMES: A DREAM, - - - - -	36
<i>Illustration by Harry Christie.</i>	

	Page
ADDRESS TO A SHETLAND PONY, - - - - -	40
<i>Two Illustrations: one by Harry Christie and one by Charles Keene.</i>	
FAREWELL, - - - - -	42
<i>Illustration by Charles Keene.</i>	
FOULA, - - - - -	44
<i>Illustration by J. Sands.</i>	
COMFORT, - - - - -	45
THE REAL WORKERS, - - - - -	47
THE TAILOR AND THE LERWICK R. N. R.'S, - - - - -	48
<i>Illustration by Charles Keene.</i>	
MY NATIVE TOWN, - - - - -	49
BONNIE DUNDEE, - - - - -	51
RETROSPECTION, - - - - -	53
VERSES ADDRESSED TO TWO YOUNG LADIES, THE MISSES EDGINTON, from Tasmania, one of whom remarked that people sometimes objected to their country because it possessed no antiquities, - - - - -	55
THE BEGGAR'S DOG, - - - - -	57
<i>Illustration by Harry Christie.</i>	
EPHEMERAL FAME, - - - - -	59
A REVOLUTION, - - - - -	60
SKERRYVORE. Written in the Visitors' Book there, - - - - -	62
KILKENNETH—TIREE, - - - - -	63
SORABY—TIREE, - - - - -	64
THE STORM, - - - - -	64
<i>Illustration by Harry Christie.</i>	

	Page
THE BAGPIPES, - - - - -	66
<i>Two Illustrations by Charles Keene: one, the Frontispiece.</i>	
THE SHETLAND SIXERN, - - - - -	68
<i>Illustration by Charles Keene.</i>	
RIGHTS OF WAY, - - - - -	70
LINKS WRITTEN ON THE FLY-LEAF OF A GAELIC TESTAMENT, -	72
<i>Illustration by Charles Keene.</i>	
THE WITCH AND THE WABSTER, - - - - -	73
<i>Illustration by J. Sands.</i>	
PEACE ON EARTH ; OR, THE FIRST ATLANTIC CABLE, - - - - -	76
SCIENTIFIC MACHINERY, - - - - -	78
LINKS ON A COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE TOBACCO PIPES, - - - - -	83
THE SPIDER, - - - - -	84
TO MISS RANOLINA STEWART, ON HER SEVENTEENTH BIRTHDAY, -	87
VAILA, - - - - -	88
MORE LIGHT ! - - - - -	93
TIREE, - - - - -	94
<i>Illustration by Charles Keene.</i>	
IN MEMORY OF THE LATE DR. JAMES HASTIE STODDART, Editor of the 'Glasgow Herald,' - - - - -	101



KING JAMES' WEDDING.

CANTO I.

FICTITIOUS topics do not suit my Muse,
Nor hazy phrases such as now-a-days
Some bards of no small reputation use,
To veil perhaps the leanness of their lays
And make a shallow theme appear abstruse ;
But simple language that the sense conveys
Methinks is best, and, daring contradiction,
I hold that truth is stranger far than fiction.

I choose a subject from authentic story
And at a date contiguous to our own,
And not in ages distant, dim, and hoary,
When Scot fought Pict with weapons made of stone,
But when old Scotland in the height of glory
Had still a monarch on her ancient throne,
And when the Reformation was completed,
The Kirk triumphant, and the Pope defeated.

A

King James, with pluck that caused astonishment,
To Denmark sailed to convoy home his bride,
Who had been forced when she to him was sent
To put about by stress of wind and tide.
And to Upslo the royal lover went,
Though in that town he did not long abide ;
But when the nuptials had been celebrated
He crossed to Copenhagen town and waited.

And through the winter he and all his train
(Three hundred Scots of high and low degree)
The Danish King did grandly entertain
With shows and feasts and ceaseless revelry,
With toasts and cheers, and cheers and cheers again,
Whilst kettle-drums took up the three-times-three,
And cannon to the trumpets answered back
Until the firmament appeared to crack.

In such delights the time flew swiftly by,
And summer came and genial weather brought ;
The winds blew light, and waves no longer high
Seemed safe to cross by either ship or boat.
But none can tell by gazing at the sky
How soon by storms a vessel may be caught,
And weather even in these days of science
Will sometimes set our forecasts at defiance.

At length the Royal couple bade adieu
To Copenhagen's hospitable port,—
The breeze was fair, and for a day or two
The wavelets played like lions' cubs in sport
Around the fleet, and then a blast it blew
Which terrified the King and all his Court—
A tempest which the oldest sailors swore
They never had beheld the like before.

Except the jib and topsails every sail
Was furled, and those were double-reefed no doubt ;
The bluff-bowed vessels ran before the gale,
And pitched and tossed, and rolled and yawed about ;
The spray in sheets jumped high above the rail,
The boatswain bawled, ‘All hands on deck—turn out !’
The crew ran fore and aft with hurried tread,
Which scared the sea-sick passengers in bed.

The timbers groaned and creaked at every roll,
The doors upon their hinges banged and crashed,
All lumber that was loose defied control ;
From side to side the chests and coffers dashed
Like batt'ring rams ; the steward cursed his soul
When all his costly crockery was smashed,
Upon the poop the thud of falling ropes
Made many in the cabin give up hopes.

A heavy sea upon the skylight fell
And broke the window and put out the light,
Which made the ladies in the darkness yell
And swoon and take hysterics with affright.
Through all the ship there was a stifling smell
Of rotten water in the bilge that night,
Which, mixed with fumes of tar and other stenches,
Was most offensive to these noble wenches.

No king however great can rule the waves,
As Knut the Dane once showed his flunkey friends,
And any monarch that the ocean braves
Must take such weather as old Neptune sends ;
But James, attended by a pack of knaves
Who practised on him for their selfish ends,
Was apt, being weak though erudite in mind,
To think Old Nick had sent that gale of wind.

But for a little let us leave the Queen
Sick in her bunk upon these raging seas,
Whilst James beside her, looking glum and green,
Sits with a basin resting on his knees,
And to North Berwick let us shift the scene,
Where I will introduce you, if you please,
To some strange characters in human form
Who brewed, it was believed, that dreadful storm.



CANTO II.

ONE night in May, when decent men and women
Were resting from their toils in peaceful slumber,
And none but colliers were at work and seamen,
At Berwick Kirk there gathered a great number
Of wicked wretches, agents of the Demon
Ever awake to baffle and encumber
All righteous plans which Providence has blessed,
And Satan posted there amongst the rest.

And Gellie Duncan from Tranent appeared
(The servant lass of David Seton there),
And Doctor Fian, who was greatly feared,
Upon a pike-staff cantered through the air,
And Agnes Sampson on a broom careered
(Who cured the sick, when physic failed, with prayer),
And many more whose names I need not mention
Attended this iniquitous convention.

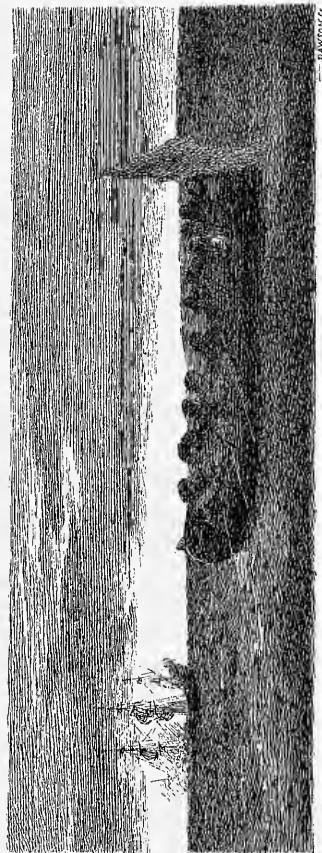
Satan himself, who in the pulpit stood,
Commenced proceedings with a song of praise,
Followed by prayer, extempore but good,
And afterwards a psalm and paraphrase ;

And then he told his hearers that they should
Not trust in faith, but use the means and ways
To profit by King James' situation
And bring disaster on his navigation.

This overture was heard with much respect,
And after some discussion all agreed
That such a rare occasion to neglect
Would be most reprehensible indeed ;
And also if the squadron must be wrecked
Then every witch and warlock should proceed
At once to seek the vessels and surprise them,
And raise a storm to batter and capsize them.

Then from the Kirk the congregation ran,
The greater part decrepit, old and queer,
And Satan, rather bigger than a man,
Came cloven-hoofed and hobbling in the rear ;
And in accordance with their wicked plan
They all embarked in riddles at the pier,
When all the fleet—if we a fleet can style it—
Went off to sea with Satan as the pilot.

Three days they scudded ere they saw a sail,
And it a ship abandoned seemed to be,
For not a sailor answered to their hail
As they approached upon the glassy sea ;





But all the witches leapt across the rail,
And warlocks too with like agility :
Victuals they found on board, and ate and drank,
And when they left the derelict she sank.

Again in sieves, without a sail or oar,
They glided till the fleet appeared in view,
When Nick, who went a cable-length before,
Cried ‘Stop !’ and asked if Doctor Fian knew
The way to make the angry billows roar,
And told him that he must ‘sing out Haloo !’
And at the self-same moment throw in that,’
And as he said so handed him a cat.

Nine times that cat was drawn across the fire
To make it qualified to raise a squall,
And though much singed it did not then expire,
Because *nine* lives, as must be known to all,
A cat can boast ; nor do I here require
To mention that the cat with which they maul
The sailors’ backs in warships is *nine-tailed*,
And was devised when pagan faiths prevailed.

The Doctor, as instructed, cried ‘Haloo !’
And tossed the cat into the glassy ocean,
Which is the proper way a storm to brew,
Though some may deem it but a foolish notion ;

And scarcely had he done so ere it blew
A gale which put the billows in commotion,
And nearly wrecked the fleet in which King James
Was coming home with all his lords and dames.

When Doctor Fian had performed this trick
The witches turned and shaped a course for shore,
And half a cable-length ahead was Nick,
Who acted pilot as he did before ;
And when the gang arrived at North Berwick
They marched in couples to the Old Kirk door,
Whilst Gellie on the trump played merrily,
'Kimmer, go ye before, Kimmer, go ye.'

Three times against the sun—or *widershin*—
(So was this cantrip called in ancient days)
The witches marched before they entered in,
When Nick again began with prayer and praise ;
Then preached a sermon such as Doctor Phin
Could not excel in matter or in phrase ;
And when some psalms and anthems had been sung
They all went out to dance, both old and young.

Upon a tombstone Gellie Duncan stood,
A comely damsel, rosy, young, and plump,
Who had to sickly people done much good,
And now played reels and strathspeys on the trump.

The witches danced as nimbly as they could,
Although rheumatic feet played thump, thump, thump
Upon the graves within that hollow ground
Where generations lay in slumber sound.

CANTO III.

BUT we will let these monsters have their fling,
And in the darkness rob, like ghouls, the graves,
And must return to where the Queen and King
Were left in peril on the yeasty waves ;
And though Old Nick expected no such thing,
Nor did the hags who were his willing slaves,
The gale abated and the sea beneath
Subsided so that James arrived at Leith.

Oh ! that in lofty language I could tell
The welcome back the gallant monarch got,
How cannon roared and ding-donged every bell,
And boys fired *dags* and adults muskets shot ;
How from The Cross the wine ran like a well,
And all could drink although without a groat ;
How from the morn till night, and night till morn,
Was heard the bagpipe, flute-a-bèc, and horn.

But such high themes require a Muse as high,
For such I feel my humble powers unfit ;
Besides, the standard chronicles that I
Have read are vague and all details omit ;
Suffice it that with great solemnity
The crown (hapless the head that weareth it !)
Was placed by Mr. Bruce, a worthy man
And Presbyterian, on the head of Anne.

No doubt King Jamie gossiped all his life
About the passage he had undertaken ;
And how at Upslo he had found his wife,
And drank his Rhenish down at Copenhagen ;
And how at sea the elemental strife
The strongest nerves with terror would have shaken ;
Whilst fawning courtiers, we need scarcely mention,
Would to his yarns have paid profound attention.

But months elapsed—I think a year was spent—
And none essayed by James' trip to profit,
When David Seton, Bailie in Tranent,
Fell on a plan to take advantage of it.
A baser fiend, though of an old descent,
Than David Seton never came from Tophet ;
Although I much suspect he had a hint on
The subject from Lord Seton, Earl of Winton.

The Bailie, as already sung or said,
A servant damsels had within his dwelling,
Who often watched at night beside the bed
Of any neighbour who was sick and ailing ;
And though to leechcraft she had not been bred
She knew the way to dress a cut or swelling :
And being guilty of no other thing
He planned by means of that to gull the King.

He ordered Gellie Duncan to be seized,
And questioned her how she had learned to heal
The neighbours who were wounded or diseased,
And whether her preceptor was the *deil*.
Her thumbs were put into the screws and squeezed,
And as the truth she struggled to conceal
A cord was twisted round her head till she
Made a confession in her agony.

She told what she at Berwick Kirk had seen,
And all that happened as described before,
And how she travelled on the ocean green
To wreck the King before he reached the shore ;
She gave the names of others who had been
Along with her—some thirty souls or more,
Who never had of witchcraft been suspected
Till they by David Seton were detected.

These thirty culprits were incarcerated,
And brought to trial at the proper season
Charged with the crimes here faithfully related,
To wit, the crimes of sorcery and treason.
They all denied what David's lass had stated.

The Court had no respect for proof or reason,
But with the *boots* and *screws* stopped all evasion,
And forced assent to Gellie's declaration.

The King displayed great interest in this work,
As any one in his position would ;
The tune that Gellie played at Berwick Kirk
Upon the trump when on a stone she stood
Whilst witch and warlock capered in the mirk,
He sent for her to play at Holyrood ;
But her compliance with his sage behest
Availed her nought—she perished with the rest.

And through the country went the King's decree
That ministers of Jesus should enquire
Whether the fearful crime of sorcery
Was practised in their parishes or shire,
With orders that if such should prove to be
The guilty might be put to death with fire :
An edict which the ministers obeyed,
And thousands perished through the King's tirade.

Lord Seton was by James most highly rated,
Because his services were great and many,
The Earl of Winton he was now created,
And got a grant of coal-pits at Cowcanny.
The truth about these victims I have stated,
But if, as is most likely, there are any
Who have a wish the whole details to learn,
They should procure a copy of Pitcairn.*

* 'Pitcairn's Justiciary Records.' An abridged and garbled account is also to be found in Mackay's 'Extraordinary Popular Delusions.'

NOTES TO KING JAMES' WEDDING.

THE uniformity existing between the 'confessions' of those who were accused of having, in 1590, raised a storm by witchcraft to wreck King James VI. and his Queen proves that they must all have come from one source, namely, from the invention of David Seton, of Tranent, who was bailiff or bailie to Lord Seton, afterwards created Earl of Winton, probably at the suggestion of the latter, who was one of James' favourites and must have been well acquainted with his credulity and with all the incidents of the voyage. It is also clear that David Seton must have had aiders and abettors in that horrible den the Court of Justiciary, who, by means of *bootikins*, *pillie-winkis*, *cashieclaws*, and other instruments of torture, compelled the accused to concur in the declaration which that villain had previously extorted by the same diabolical method from his servant, Gellie Duncan. It is surprising that all who have written on the subject should have expressed surprise at the uniformity of the confessions, the true explanation of which seems evident,

and that it should have been left to me to discover the real delinquents and to clear the characters of the innocent victims who suffered through their villainy. Is there any man so deficient in understanding as to believe that thirty people, when subjected to the most exquisite torments that the human mind could invent, would all give the same account of impossible adventures and occurrences which they denied before they were tortured? It seems obvious that they were prompted. People had been accused of and executed for witchcraft previous to 1591, but in comparatively small numbers; but after David Seton had succeeded in destroying thirty at one fell swoop—and these thirty belonging to a gang of three hundred who had been engaged in a plot to take the life of his Majesty himself—James took vigorous measures to extirpate these servants of the devil. He wrote a ‘Treatise on Demonology and Witchcraft.’ He also issued commissions to the magistrates and ministers of the Kirk, giving them the fullest powers to try and punish offenders. He recommended that persons suspected should be thrown into the water and thereby tested. If they sank they were to be considered innocent; but if they floated it was an infallible sign of guilt. The mania for hunting and executing witches spread throughout the realm, and thousands of unfortunate people were tortured, strangled, and burned to ashes. David Seton, and probably his master, must have been highly gratified at the success of their stratagem. Lord Seton was rewarded with an Earldom and a grant of coal-pits at Cockenzie, which I have spelt in the preceding rhyme according to the pronunciation of the inhabitants, who are doubtless right. Dr. Fian—whose proper name was Cunningham, and who was a young man and a teacher in Tranent—was cruelly tortured in order to extort a confession which he retracted immediately on the stoppage of the operation. His finger-nails were drawn out by pincers, and his legs were crushed with wedges driven into iron boots until the blood and marrow spurted forth. He was afterwards strangled and burned, along with Gellie Duncan and the other miserable victims, on the Castle Hill of Edinburgh. This happened thirty-one years after the Reformation and nineteen years after the death of John Knox, and such atrocities continued to be committed, although with a gradual decrease, for

upwards of a century afterwards. Perhaps consciousness of this fact, as well as other prejudices, may be the reason why our historians have treated these extraordinary events in such a sketchy and confused manner, and have shown such reluctance to admit the complete innocence of the victims. An old woman was burned at the stake in Sutherlandshire in 1722, and this was the last execution for witchcraft which occurred in Scotland. This was 162 years after the Reformation.

‘In the moneth of August of the next year—1589—Queyne Anne, doghter to Frederic, King of Denmarc, was mariet in Denmarc to King James the Sixth of Scotland, be his embassador the Erle Marischal, who was directit thair for that effect. In the end of that yeir the tempest of storme, bayth be sea and land, was sae vehement that many ships pereshit upoun the sea, sae that the passage for Queyne Anne was veri difficult to cum in Scotland, and the King abayed daylie frae the moneth of August luiking for her arryvall, while at last upoun the 22nd day of October, without lang deliberatioun, he embarkit himself with his Chancellor Maitland, and certain uthers of his officiers and courteours, at the Port of Leyth, and saillit to Opslo, whare Queyne Anne was attending upoun fayre wether, and little luiking for his Majestie’s coming to hir at sik a tempestuous tyme of the yeir, whar he abaid a certayne short season, and then he past in Denmarc, and returnit not in Scotland till the moneth of Mai in the next yeir.’—‘History of James the Sixth.’

‘*Then preached a sermon such as Doctor Phin,’ &c.*—This was written before the death of the Rev. Doctor, whose conduct in relation to the appointment of a pastor for the parish of Walls the author (who acted as secretary to the congregation) did not admire. The candidate whom the people selected, and who received a certificate of good character from the Presbytery, was tried behind his back, condemned and boycotted, and another, in spite of the earnest remonstrances and formal protest of the flock, and in violation of the laws of the Church, was inducted into the vacant charge. The congregation appealed to the General Assembly, who censured the Presbytery for their irregular proceedings, but confirmed the induction. The church, which used to be well filled, is now nearly empty.

ADDRESS TO THE SUN.

WRITTEN WHILST WORKING AMONGST RELICS OF SOLAR-WORSHIP.

THOU glorious orb that in unfathomed space
Shinest for ever with unlesioned ray,
Unlike to Earth, our shifting dwelling-place,
Where all is renovation and decay,
I marvel not that men in ancient days
Did temples build to thee and altars raise.

Cruel Time, who plays the fickle despot here,
And all the good he gives takes quickly back,
Who dims the eyes that were so bright and clear
And turns the hair to snow erewhile so black,
Who bends the frame and stiffens every limb,—
Thy ever youthful splendour cannot dim.

The pond'rous globe he moulds like potter's clay,
He makes the sea change places with the shore,
The lofty hills his restless will obey
And at his word become an ocean floor ;
The bottom of the deep on high he lifts,
But thee he never innovates or shifts.

All we possess to solace and sustain
We owe to thee : beneath thy glance benign
The fertile soil produces golden grain,
And clust'ring grapes hang heavy from the vine,
Whose juice, fermented, cheers our weary souls,
And in the sea fish swim in countless shoals.

All things we see are by thy magic beams
Bedecked with colours to delight the eye :
The trees and flowers, the rain-clouds and the streams,
The feathered fowls that in the welkin fly,
The very moths that flit when day is done,
All owe their hues to thee, thou wondrous sun.

The sage may to a yard compute thy girth,
Or calculate thy weight within a grain,
Or find in feet thy distance from the earth ;
But still a miracle thou wilt remain
To him who looks with undeluded sight,
Thou everlasting source of warmth and light !

ADDRESS TO THE EARTH.

OH, wondrous Earth ! whose wonder is concealed
Lest it to mortals should be too appalling,
Or but in fitful flashes is revealed,
And swiftly vanishes beyond recalling.

Around the sun in our stupendous boat
We dash through space by magic navigation,
And few there are thus fearfully afloat
Who ever marvel at their situation.

Whence did we come ? and whither are we bound ?
The thoughtful ask, but never get an answer ;
Art thou the work of Deity profound,
Or of some diabolic necromancer ?

Thy countenance is lovely to behold,
Thy bounties are bestowed in great profusion,
Yet all thy gifts resemble fairy gold
And prove a disappointment and delusion.

How blessed is youth ! how hopeful and how gay !
How graceful is its form ! how lithe and active !

Yet in a little while it steals away
And leaves a wreck, careworn and unattractive.

And though the aged, whilst they draw their breath,
May grasp at power or lucre with avidity,
Yet life to them is but a lingering death,
Which ends at last in horrible putridity.

Although thy visage wears a smile benign,
Thy heart is cruel and thy hands are gory,
And even man, whose soul seems half divine,
Regards destruction as his greatest glory.

With horns and drums he marches to the fight,
Making a desert of the fairest scenery,
And, lacking claws to rend and fangs to bite,
Commits his wholesale murders by machinery.

And when he hangs the trumpet on the wall
His wish to slay continues in activity,
And on dumb animals, both large and small,
He gratifies his truculent proclivity.

The poor in droves must from their holdings clear,
And go abroad, though bitterly unwilling,
That their small patches may be stocked with deer,
And lords enjoy the luxury of killing.

Oh ! that the Great the shambles would frequent,
And help the butcher with his needful labours,
Their time in sports congenial would be spent,
Which would do good, not evil, to their neighbours.

No one is honoured like the fratricide,
Or is received with louder acclamations ;
With money he is lavishly supplied,
His blood-red coat is hid with decorations.

And even he who shoots in copse or field,
Or on the moors amongst the mists and vapours,
Feels no small pride when many birds are killed,
And gets the number blazoned in the papers.

All living things that travel in the sky,
Or walk or crawl on ground, or swim in water,
As helpless victims have been made to die,
Or have been armed with instruments of slaughter.

Nations arise and bustle for a day,
Resign their place, and vanish in the distance ;
Through books we hear their voices far away,
Or crumbling ruins speak of their existence.

Life is transmitted through an endless chain,
One generation pushes out another ;

No permanent result seems to remain
Of all this never-ceasing change and pother.

Too often one is tempted to believe
Thou art the plaything of some power infernal,
Although it is not harder to conceive
That thou art self-existent and eternal.

Terrific thought ! that thou may'st never end :
That through the ages that have no finality
Myriads from myriads may in thee descend
Of wretches doomed to sorrow and mortality.

Better that some huge comet should collide
And kindle with its tail a conflagration ;
Should sweep and smelt thee in thy orbit wide—
Incomprehensible abomination !

But what know we who only see a part ?
How can the Finite understand Infinity ?
Enough, there is an instinct in the heart
Which tells thou art directed by Divinity.

WEDDING RINGS.

I LIKE when I'm at home to see the crops,
The horses and the hinds at their employment ;
But when in town the windows of the shops
Afford me much enjoyment.

The other day I chanced to see some things
A Jeweller had assorted for inspection,
And 'mongst the rest a lot of wedding rings
Attracted my attention.

So many rings thus dangling on a thrum—
All marriage rings—appeared to me surprising ;
So there I stood, with wonder deaf and dumb,
Musing and moralising.

Of how much weal, of how much woe, I said,
Are these same trinkets there the signs and symbols !
That cord of hoops as callously displayed
As if they were but thimbles.

This ring, for instance, may perhaps unite
A well-matched pair, affectionate and dutiful,





Whose love will be a fountain of delight
Through life so brief and mutable.

And that may like a pair of hand-cuffs bind
Two souls whose constant prayer is separation,
Who hold each other both in flesh and mind
In utter detestation.

This ring an angel's finger may adorn,
And make her subject to some ruffian's tyranny,
A helpless butt for brutal wit and scorn
And idiotic irony.

Some bitter, naggling jade may wear this ring,
Some shrew, who can be honey till she dupe us;
But whose vile tongue is worse than hornet's sting,
Or drippings from the Upas.

Or possibly a horse-leech in the guise
Of some fair woman, deaf to rhyme and reason,
Who must have cash, and recks not how it flies,
Her finger it may squeeze on.

This house or carpet she must really have,
This watch, or brooch, or other costly vanity,
Whilst her poor partner drudges like a slave,
Or sinks into insanity.

Over the irksome desk all day he bends,
Or at the easel toils without cessation,
Whilst madam in the shops his money spends,
And gallops to ruination.

And not the destiny of these alone,
But that of all their progeny descending
Until the final trumpet shall be blown,
Is on that thrum depending.

SONG OF THE SHETLAND LASS.

WITH a snow-white hap on her head,
And *rivilins* tied on her feet,
A fair-haired, rosy-cheeked Shetland maid
Trudged with a *kishie* of peat.
Trudge, trudge, trudge,
She trudged the scathold along,
And still as she went, with her body bent,
She sang this sorrowful song :



‘ From the morning till late at night
My knitting wires seldom are still ;
I can clip and roo, and card and spin too,
And knit whatever you will.

Knit, knit, knit,
A shawl that the Queen could wear,
A stocking or sock, or a sailor’s frock,
To keep out the Greenland air.

‘ But my labour is all in vain,
Somebody has stolen my luck,
For all that I make to the shop I must take
And hand it over to Truck.

Truck, truck, truck,
For calico, sugar, and tea ;
No money I get for the wares I knit,
Or it would be better for me.

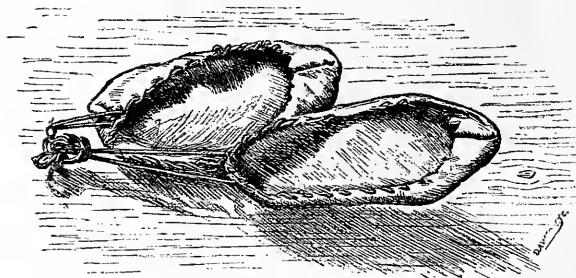
‘ My father he goes to the *haaf*
In a boat that floats like a duck,
But the cod and the ling to the man he must bring
Who keeps the station for Truck.

Truck, truck, truck,
For the meal we got last year ;
Since he worked when a boy in the trucker’s employ
He has lived in hunger and fear.

' My *braedur* Magnus and Tom
Made a trip to Davy's Straits,
But all that they earned when they returned
Was kept for my father's debts.

Truck, truck, truck,—
Oh ! shame on the Kingdom and Crown,
And fie on the laws that dally and pause
In putting the truck-rig down.'

With a snow-white hap on her head
And *rivilins* tied on her feet,
A blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked Shetland maid
Trudged with a *kishie* of peat.
Trudge, trudge, trudge,
She trudged the scathold along,
And still as she went, with her body bent,
She sang that sorrowful song.





'Trunk!'



THE SEVEN HUNTERS:

OR,

FLANNAN ISLES.

THE setting sun his golden ray
Flings o'er green fields and dusky shaw,
Well pleased I gaze on Gosford Bay
And purple cone of Berwick Law ;
But through this prospect fair and wide,
As through a veil, more pleased I scan
With Fancy's eye the stormy tide
And desert islands of St. Flann.

These islands, far from Scotia's shore,
By human foot now seldom trod,
Where holy men in days of yore
Retired to live alone with God ;
The tiny church and bee-hive cell,
Built when the Christian faith began,
Still stand, untouched by Time, to tell
The ancient story of St. Flann.

And in one isle, tradition says,
 There dwelt of old a pigmy race,
Whose dwarfish bones sometimes amaze
 The daring crews who dig the place ;
And though that tale may not be true,
 Enough remains to tempt the man
Who better loves the old than new
 To search the islands of St. Flann.

From far St. Kilda's giddy steep,
 When free from vapour was the sky,
I oft have gazed across the deep
 Upon these isles with wistful eye ;
And sometimes then I said and swore
 I will go thither if I can,
And every foot of ground explore
 Within the circuit of St. Flann.

On cushioned couches to recline,
 And over books alone to bend,
Is not the method, I opine,
 Our ancient annals to extend ;
But in the field to search and brood
 Appears a preferable plan,
And is the reason why I should
 Be glad of quarters in St. Flann.

NOTE TO THE SEVEN HUNTERS.

'To the north-west of Gallen Head, and within six leagues of it, lie the Flannan Islands, which the seamen call the North Hunters. They are but small islands, and six in number, and maintain about seventy sheep yearly. The inhabitants of the adjacent islands of the Lewis, having a right to these islands, visit them once every summer and there make a great purchase of fowls, eggs, downs, feathers, and quills. When they go to sea they have their boat well manned, and make towards the islands with an east wind; but if before or at the landing the wind turn westerly they hoist up sail and steer directly home again. If any of the crew is a novice and not versed in the customs of the place, he must be instructed perfectly in all the punctilios observed here before landing; and to prevent inconveniences that they think may ensue upon the transgression of the least nicety observed here, every novice is always joined with another that can instruct him all the time of their fowling; so all the boats' crews are matched in this manner. After their landing they fasten their boat to the sides of a rock, and then fix a wooden ladder by laying a stone at the foot of it to prevent it falling into the sea; and when they are got up into the island all of them uncover their heads and make a turn sun-ways round, thanking God for their safety.' This is an extract from Martin's quaint description of this interesting group of islands, from which it will be observed that the worship of the sun survived in the Hebrides two centuries ago, and indeed traces of that ancient worship are still clearly observable there. On one of the isles there is a small cell or chapel, of the most primitive construction, which antiquaries conjecture must be the earliest example of a Christian church, and, guessing the date, employ it as a criterion for determining the date of other ecclesiastical edifices. In all probability the *Teampull Beannachadh*, Temple of Blessings, is a relic of solar and not of Early Christian worship. Martin further says: 'When they (the crews) are come within about twenty

paces of the altar they all strip themselves of their upper garments at once, and their upper clothes being laid upon a stone which stands there on purpose for that use, all the crew pray three times before they begin fowling ; the first day they say the first prayer, advancing towards the chapel upon their knees ; the second prayer is said as they go round the chapel ; the third is said hard by or at the chapel, and this is their morning service. Their vespers are performed with the like number of prayers. Another rule is, that it is absolutely unlawful to kill a fowl with a stone, for that they reckon a great barbarity and directly contrary to ancient custom.' Martin also mentions that the crews who visited the Flannan Isles employed a language which was never used elsewhere, and a similar custom prevails in Foula to this day. Many words used on land are considered unlucky at sea, and are carefully avoided. The Lewis men called the Flannan Isles *the country*, and St. Kilda *the high country*. Foula men, when fishing, call Foula *Clumper*. Martin likewise says : 'The Island of Pigmies, or, as the natives call it, the Island of Little Men, is but of small extent. There have been many small bones dug out of the ground here, resembling those of human kind more than any other. This gave ground to a tradition which the natives have of a very low-statured people being once here, called *Lushirdan*, i.e., Pigmies.' Wilson, in his 'Voyage round the Coasts of Scotland and the Isles,' says in reference to the Flannans : 'The buildings in question were dedicated to St. Flann, a patron saint said to have flourished in the ninth century. Some regard them as Druidical, and therefore of more ancient date. These small islands are the *Insulae Sacrae* of Buchanan.' (Vol. II. p. 114.) Mr. Muir, in his 'Characteristics of Old Church Architecture,' gives an interesting account of the buildings on these isles. But his visit was brief, and--being not only an indefatigable explorer but an antiquary devoid of any petty jealousy—he strongly advised me to make a more thorough investigation of the Flannans, which as yet it has never been in my power to do. I will take this opportunity of expressing the conjecture that the primitive edifices in the islets of Rona and Sul-skerry probably pertain to Pagan and not to Christian times. The human mind has a strong tendency, when guessing at dates, to give short measure of time.

ADDRESS TO A MOUSE,

WHICH HAD MANGLED A VOLUME OF BURNS' POEMS PUBLISHED IN 1794.

UNGRATEFUL mouse, that could deface
The works of him who on thy race
Has preached a rhyming sermon,
Which teaches all but hearts of steel
A kindly sympathy to feel
For creatures we call vermin.

No one but Burns had ever dared
To hint that mice-nests should be spared,
Or mourned their demolition ;
And yet his favours you forget,
And deep into his book have bit,
And it an old edition !

Both men and boys your breed detest,
And look upon you as a pest
With mingled hate and loathing ;
And even gentle women shriek
With speechless horror when you seek
A refuge in their clothing.

A hundred traps have been designed
By people of inventive mind
 To catch, and drown, and strangle ;
And yet the works of Scotia's Bard,
Who has alone expressed regard,
 You mutilate and mangle !

But like the playful dog that tore,
And left in shreds upon the floor,
 Sir Isaac's calculations,
Perhaps you never thought upon
The harm and mischief you had done,
 And consequent vexations.

Some ministers, and not a few,
Who ought to know much more than you
 About poetic matters,
When they of Burns or hear or speak,
Their stupid malice try to wreak,
 And tear his works to tatters.

Upon his birthday every year
Admirers gather, far and near,
 To gormandise and Guzzle,
To sing his songs and to recite,
And talk and toast throughout the night,
 When loaded to the muzzle.

And some sour mortal will arise,
With bilious cheek and jaundiced eyes,
 And make a long oration,
In which, to neutralise the praise,
All he can think of Burns he says
 In spiteful derogation.

In vain!—for in our Scottish hearts
The love of Burns' noble parts
 Is now too deeply rooted,
And our affection stronger grows
When by his sanctimonious foes
 His merits are disputed.

LOBSTERS AND NATIONS.

THE lobster when he casts a toe
Has power to make another grow,
And with the stunted substitute
Can hold his own in a dispute;
But certain times arrive when all
His armour-plates become too small,
And he must throw them off and get
A larger and a stronger set.

Then qualms and throes his body rack,
His cuirass splits right up the back,
His tail from out its sheath he draws,
Like easy gloves shakes off his claws ;
And, naked as a new-born child,
He lies below the billows wild,
To any fish which swims that way,
However small, a helpless prey,
Unless some rocky hole he sees
Where, hidden, he can take his ease
Until his armour is renewed.
When fit again for fight and feud
He sallies forth two times or more
The magnitude he was before,
And with his renovated toes
Can grip, and nip, and clip his foes.
And as with lobsters, so with nations :
In common times slight innovations
May serve in Governments and laws,
Like dwarfish, make-shift, jury claws ;
But periods come when changes all
Must be complete and radical,
When constitutions once our pride
Will rend and must be cast aside,
When customs old and venerated
Must be thrown off and new created

To suit the swelling age : nor can
The change be stopped by mortal man.
Nor wise is he who feels inclined
The nations in their shells to bind,
And would, by human legislation,
Resist expansion and mutation.
Wiser to see and own the sign
That change is needful and divine,
And to abridge, by recognition,
The sickly period of transition ;
Wiser to think it would be well
If Britain had a larger shell
To fit her for a fresh career,
To which the old will small appear.

THE DAW IN BORROWED PLUMES.

A DREAM.

ONE winter night, now two years gone,
I sat within my room alone,
Before a fire that brightly shone
 And made the chamber pleasant ;
And on a volume I did pore,
Replete with wit and varied lore,
Which on the back the title bore
‘St. Kilda : Past and Present.’*

With such a book before one’s nose
No one could sleep, you might suppose ;
And yet I fell into a doze
 That was nor sleep nor waking.
I heard myself distinctly snore,
I heard the book fall on the floor,
I heard the creaking of the door,
 And eke the window shaking.

* ‘St. Kilda : Past and Present.’ By George Seton, Esq., Advocate,
M.A. Oxon. Blackwood & Son.



And yet before my drowsy eyes
I saw that handsome volume rise
And turn a bird of monstrous size,
 Not smaller than a roc ;
Though from the way its plumes were spread,
And from its fleshy neck and head,
And from its self-complacent tread,
 It seemed a turkey-cock.

Methought it walked within a wood
Where some few trees looked strong and good,
Though hundreds barked and lifeless stood,
 With branches bleached and bare ;
Whilst loads of timber rotting lay
In all the stages of decay,
And shed a green, phosphoric ray
 In shady places there.

And round that turkey went, and round,
With gobbling and ferocious sound,
And pinions drumming on the ground,
 And tail spread like a fan.
Sometimes he stood a minute still,
Whilst all his feathers seemed to thrill,
And passion quivered in each quill ;
 Sometimes he threatening ran.

Then off again he'd slowly sail
With wings depressed and upright tail,
And snout that dangled long and pale,
 And warts and wens that blazed
Like rubies or carbuncles red
Upon his livid neck and head :
I must confess I felt some dread
 As at the bird I gazed.

A rapid glance I cast around
To see if in that sylvan ground
A trusty cudgel could be found
 To deal a blow, or ward ;
When lo ! a tumult in the skies,
Which nathless caused me no surprise,
Of whistling wings and fearful cries,
 To my relief I heard.

And straight, with horrid shrieks and howls,
Flew down a mighty flock of fowls,
Kestrels and corbies, crows and owls,
 And falcons too, though fewer ;
And every bird, I dreamt or thought,
Displayed a label or a note
Suspended from its savage throat,
 With this device, ' Reviewer.'

These round the gobbling turkey flew,
On all sides took a careful view,
Then with a scornful ‘Pooh! pooh! pooh!’
Which made the creature caw,
They quickly put him to the rout,
Cuffed, pecked, and hunted him about,
Plucked all his borrowed plumage out,
And left a paltry daw!

Amazed to see his feathers fall,
And that a bird so big and tall
Should in an instant turn as small,
Or smaller, than a pheasant,
I wakened with a hearty roar,
Which lasted till my sides were sore,
And then I picked up from the floor
‘St. Kilda : Past and Present.’

ADDRESS TO A SHETLAND PONY.

IN spots retired, where cliffs are steep and high,
And sea-pinks mingle with the greenest grass,
Watched by your shaggy mother's loving eye,
The nightless day in youthful sports you pass.

The sea, which all the weary winter through
In tempests raged, like silver lies outspread,
And on its verge appear in cloud-like hue
The peaks of Foula and the Fitful Head.

Fair is the scene, and sweet the sunny breeze :
Enjoy your merry gambols while you may,
Caper on awkward legs or roll at ease,
For youth and summer do not last for aye.

Time loads with care the back of man and horse,
The weight increasing as the years go round,
And soon from Vaila's pleasant isle perforce
You will be led to labour under-ground.

Down some deep shaft you will be swiftly sent
Into a pit where midnight darkness reigns,







And all your days thereafter will be spent
In muddy workings, dragging rumbling trains.

Had there been many colours in your coat
(By such small trifles are our fortunes ruled)
You might for some great circus have been bought,
And all your latent faculties been schooled.

Around the sawdust ring you would have run,
Whilst on your saddle stood a spangled maid,
And gas-lights blazed as brightly as the sun,
And horns and drums performed a gallopade.

The gay rotunda would have rung with cheers
At your sagacious tricks and glossy hide ;
But in a coal-pit you must toil for years,
Because your off hind leg alone is pied.

The rocky roof, four feet perhaps in height,
On timbers propped, but groaning to give way ;
Black passages that branch to left and right,
No sign to tell when it is night or day.

Save water-drip and distant miner's pick,
All is as silent there as in the tomb ;
No light is seen, save when some smoky wick,
With yellow glimmer, flits across the gloom.

Ah, then, when in your lamp-lit stable set,
Your manger well supplied with hay and corn,
You will remember, not without regret,
The island in the north where you were born :

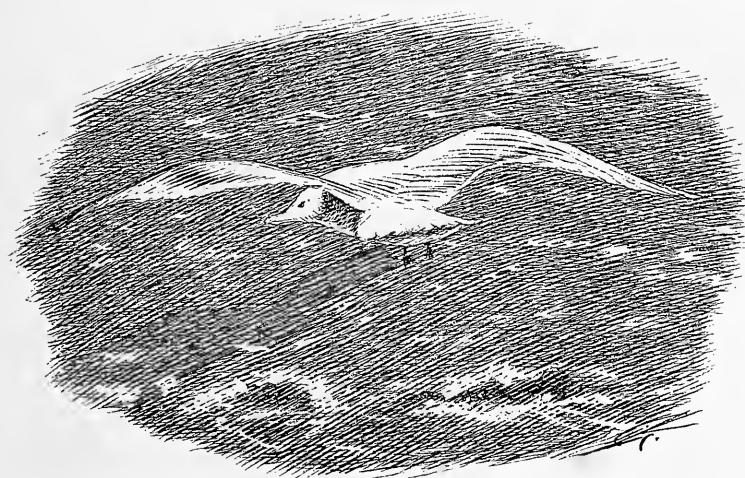
The sky, the sun, the healthy salt sea air,
The flowery sward on which you used to range,—
And doubtless you will think the richest fare
For ease and freedom is a poor exchange.

VAILA, SHETLAND, 1886.

FAREWELL.

FAREWELL to the Lothians once more !
Farewell I say without sorrow,
I pant for the wild ocean shore,
And I start for Shetland to-morrow.

Farewell to your hedges and walls,
To your fields in high cultivation,—
The sea, with its calms and its squalls,
Is better in my estimation.





Farewell to your puffing of steam,
To your engines for ploughing and thrashing ;
Oh ! give me the kittiwake's scream,
Where the billows are rolling and dashing.

Sure no mortal the heavens beneath
Ever felt half so happy at flitting,
And I sail in the 'Noran' from Leith,
God willing and weather permitting.

The 'Noran,' though small, I may state,
Is staunch and can sail like a clipper ;
Lawrence Ridley's the name of the mate,
And the bold Lawrence Hay is the skipper.

A seaman more skilful than Hay
Never stood at the wheel of a vessel ;
He knows every headland and bay
From Flugga Lighthouse to Newcastle.

Then adieu to the Lothians once more !
Farewell I say without sorrow,
I pant for the wild ocean shore,
And I start for Shetland to-morrow.

FOULA.

TIRED of the Lothians, rich but tame,
And kept for tillage and for game,
In search of liberty I came,
 And find it here, in Foula.

Here I may ramble where I will,
On peaty plain or lofty hill,
Or where the ocean, never still,
 Foams on the rocks of Foula.

Upon the Sneug, that mountain steep
Whose cliff sublime towers o'er the deep,
Where bonxies dash with threatening sweep,
 I gaze afar from Foula.

What splendid prospects meet my view
Of distant isles of cloud-like hue !
What vast expanse of waters blue
 Delights the eye in Foula !





Nor less I love the lower ground,
The crags, where gloomy caves abound,
And surges rush, with gurgling sound,
 To horrid depths in Foula.

And sweet the places to explore
That men have marked in days of yore,
Ere Norseman's galley touched the shore
 And mixed the blood of Foula.

Although my home is dull and dreary,
And my reflections often *eerie*,
Yet out of doors I seldom weary,
 Or rue my trip to Foula.

COMFORT.

EACH year that passes knocks some relic down
 That for its picturesqueness charmed the eye :
The fort and harbour and quaint fishing town,
 The hoary church and ancient castle high ;
Yea, burial stones, with moss and lichen grey,
Are by the modern Goth improved away.

Straight railways mar the fair, indented coast ;
Straight bridges, black and ugly, span the brook ;
Bow-windowed villas, that no beauty boast,
Spring up like mushrooms wheresoe'er we look :
Pretentious dwellings, scamped and sold in haste,
With gambling aims, without regard to taste.

Straight streets of shops, that weary eye and foot,
Whose fronts upon plate-glass appear to rest ;
With here and there a synagogue to suit,
A wretched copy of the old at best :
The cast-off shell of ancient faiths indeed,
The pauper coffin of a lifeless creed.

This soulless time the spirits would depress,
But for the faith that in the human heart
There is a quenchless thirst for loveliness,
An ineradicable love of art,
Which, though it slumbers long, can never die,
But will spring up and blossom by-and-by.

Old fabrics, razed, no effort can restore,
And future ages will their loss lament ;
But Architecture will revive once more,
And new and unimagined styles invent ;
When slates and stones, that now give work to men,
Can all be taken down and used again.

THE REAL WORKERS.

THE works that are a nation's greatest pride,
And are remembered when her name we hear,
Are seldom done by those who are supplied
With means that indispensable appear ;
With college culture that has won degrees,
With books, with homes where they can live at ease,—

But by the souls whose days are spent in want,
Who little schooling have, or none at all ;
Whose food and raiment are both poor and scant,
Who gather knowledge standing at a stall ;
Who in a jail or garret ply the pen,
And in their lives get no respect from men.

But who, however wretched is their state,
Through all obstruction bravely fight their way ;
Who feel they are the instruments of Fate,
And hold a mandate that they must obey ;
Whose work is joy, and all that others prize,
Compared with it, as nothing in their eyes.

THE TAILOR AND THE LERWICK R.N.R.'S.

A TAILOR dwelt in Aberdeen
Who never had in Shetland been,
But tendered to supply the tars
Who serve the Queen as R.N.R.'s,
And for their drill in Lerwick meet,
With uniforms both strong and neat.
The offer was accepted, and
The clothes were made and came to hand.
But when tried on, the trousers all
Were found to be absurdly small,
As those who managed the transaction
Without delay informed the 'fraction,'
Who, in excuse, sent this reply :
'I feel gey vexed, but fat kent I ?
I never saw, in a' my life,
A Shetland mannie or his wife,—
Though fan a loonie at the skeel
I kent their country very weel,
A tattered patch upon the map
Stuck in a corner at the tap,—
But fancied they were dwarfish creatures,
O' scrimpit buik and stunted statures,





Just like their sheepies and their shalties,
Which will account for a' my faulties,
An' foo your sailors burst the steeekies
That I put in their sarks and breekies.
Promisin' to tak care again,
I have the honour to remain.'

MY NATIVE TOWN.

SOME six miles distant on the starboard beam,
And almost level with the wave, appears
A little town, half-hid in smoke and steam,
Which has been strange to me for many years ;
And though the view is tame as view can be,
Yet in the heart it deeply moveth me.

For in that town I first beheld the light
Of the bright sun, and felt its warmth at noon ;
There first surveyed the glittering stars at night,
And gazed in wonder at the solemn moon ;
There saw the sea, upon whose silver zone
Ships sunk from sight to visit lands unknown.

Though small the town, and common-place the trade,
Though there steam-spindles raised a deafening din,
And canvas looms a ceaseless clinking made,
And tars blasphemed as ships warped out and in,
And ancient fish-like smells perfumed the air,—
Heaven lay around our childhood as elsewhere.

There life in many colours could be seen,
And all the passions, good and bad, at play ;
And there, within the churchyard, rank and green,
Where stands the shattered Abbey, old and grey,
I learned what Death meant, as with awe profound
I saw the bones of men dug from the ground.

Although the land around is low and bare,
Not so when young did it appear to me,
When with unwearied feet I wandered there,
Far from the coast and often by the sea ;
When every rural smell, and sound, and sight,
Made my heart throb with passionate delight.

Primeval forests since that distant time,
And sea-like lakes and rivers, I have seen,
And mighty cataracts and cliffs sublime,
And mountain peaks with tropic bosage green ;
But in such scenes I never felt the joy
That filled my heart when rambling there a boy.

Dear is the place where we were bred and born !
More dear than in our common moods we know.
Though we may leave it never to return,
And in the earth keep shifting to and fro,
Our hearts to it by strong, mysterious chains
Continue bound whilst life in them remains.

BONNIE DUNDEE.

IN the days of my childhood, when railways were few,
And gaudy stage-coaches through Forfarshire flew,
And guards on keyed-bugles played right merrily,
I was taken to look at the sights of Dundee.

How bustling and big seemed the town in my eyes,
How foreign the customs and curious the cries ;
Balsora or Bagdad not stranger could be
Than the streets and the natives of Bonnie Dundee.

The Barracks and Bridewell I gazed at with awe,
And the rickety train that was drawn up the Law ;
The Town-House and window were both shown to me,
Where rogues in a halter were hung in Dundee.

The *Howff*, with its medley of quaint sculptured stones,
Below one of which lay my grandfather's bones,
At rest after battles by land and by sea,
I surveyed on my jaunt to Bonnie Dundee.

Since those distant days far from home I have been,
And many strange cities and countries have seen ;
But all who have wandered, I think, will agree
No city is fairer than Bonnie Dundee.

Its merchants are clever and active in trade,
And make a right use of the wealth they have made ;
And with their huge purses are princely and free,
When improvements are wanted in Bonnie Dundee.

I feel much affection for that ancient town,
For trade may it ever retain its renown,
And in science and art win the top of the tree,
And make Scotia proud of her Bonnie Dundee !

RETROSPECTION.

OFT have I said, when sailing on the deep,
Whilst glassy billows glanced beneath the moon,
This lovely night my memory will keep,
To cheer my heart when it is out of tune.

Outspread aloft, from yard and stunsail boom,
A towering mass of cloth was seen in shade,
Save where the moonlight wriggled in the gloom,
Like silver serpents, when the zephyrs played.

With face aglow, but all the figure dark,
A silent sailor stood abaft the wheel ;
With listless arms he steered the sluggish bark,
As through the sea she forged with plunging keel.

The startled turtle as he clattered past,
Aroused from slumber on the slumbering tide ;
The spacious sails that flapped against the mast,
The sound of ripples on the vessel's side ;

The midnight bell, that struck a double note,
Four times repeated in a lofty tone ;
And all the sounds that, in a ship afloat,
Amidst the silence make the silence known.

But when deep grief or care the mind torments,
These pleasant scenes we never recollect ;
And Retrospection only then presents
Such pictures as are fitted to deject.

An endless suite of halls she drags us through,
All hung with pieces painted long ago ;
The Dance of Death she keeps before our view,
And other works that aggravate our woe.

VERSES,

ADDRESSED TO TWO YOUNG LADIES, THE MISSES EDGINTON, FROM TASMANIA,
ONE OF WHOM REMARKED THAT PEOPLE SOMETIMES OBJECTED TO THEIR
COUNTRY BECAUSE IT POSSESSED NO ANTIQUITIES.

GRIEVE not, fair ladies, that your native land
No history boasts,—that on the plain or hill
No feudal towers and ancient abbeys stand,
Or relics of a period older still.

Be thankful that Tasmania had no need
To fight the battles Scotland had to fight,
With foes outside, and foes at home indeed,
In its advance from darkness into light.

Be thankful that no story you can tell
Of men who suffered for religion's sake ;
Of women, said to be in league with Hell,
Whose tortured frames were roasted at the stake.

Be thankful that you cannot speak a word
Of war, and woes that follow in its track ;

Of peopled districts scourged by fire and sword ;
Of famine, and the Death that men called Black.

Civilisation, which has been so slow
Of growth in Britain, and which struggles still
With royal parasites that make a show,
But check its progress, and at length may kill,—

Transplanted as a twig to your blest isle,
A twig from creeping plants and fungi free,
Has taken root, and in a little while
Has grown into a strong and healthy tree.

A tree which, from the blossoms I have seen
With pleasure wafted to our northern air,
I think with any in the forest green
For sweetness and for beauty may compare.

WALLS, SHETLAND, August 1887.





T H E B E G G A R ' S D O G .

[Published in ‘Chambers’s Journal.’]

RAMBLING one day in London City
I saw a dog that raised my pity,
A wretched cur, all bone and skin,
That walked the muddy gutter in,
And in his mouth—I smiled at that---
He held an old and crownless hat.
With shrewd and supplicating eye,
He watched the bustling passers-by,
Who in their haste, as on they fared,
Nor cast a glance at him nor cared ;
Yet some, when they had passed ten paces,
Would halt with grins upon their faces.
The creature’s story was indeed
So plain that he who ran could read :
'A beggar's dog—the beggar dead,
The dog still carries on the trade,
And trusts through diligence and care
The public patronage to share.'
I sauntered on, but as I went
My thoughts upon that dog were bent.

Behold ! I said in cogitation,
The force of custom, education ;
And though we smile at him, egad !
Some human plans are quite as bad.
How many schemes in this same town
Are merely hats without the crown,—
Ways indirect, but most complete,
Of tossing money on the street ;
How many hospitals and schools,
With funds bequeathed by wealthy fools ;
How many missions to the Jews,
To Ethiopians and Hindoos,
To Turks, and other unbelievers,
Prove in the end mere crownless beavers,
Through which, if I the truth may utter,
Vast sums are dropped into the gutter !

EPHEMERAL FAME.

FRET not, oh Bard, although thy works are few :
If but one line or verse of thine be read
A generation after thou art dead,
Thou wilt have done what thousands fail to do.

A countless fleet of vessels leave the port—
The port poetic—craft of every kind,
With all their canvas set to catch the wind,
But with the most the voyage is but short.

And many of them that for size and strength
Seem built to plough the deep a thousand years,
That leave the harbour with triumphant cheers,
Capsize before they sail a cable's length.

Ambitious works that won both praise and pelf,
And looked immortal fifty years ago,—
Epics and dramas,—are forgotten now,
And stand, worm-eaten, on the dusty shelf.

The future will have poets of its own,
Whose thoughts and words will better suit the times ;
And all except a fraction of our rhymes
Will in a little while become unknown.

A REVOLUTION.

ALTHOUGH no riotous crowds the streets parade,
With beating drums and sable flags displayed,
With axe and broom and other emblems strange,
That speak of radical and sweeping change ;
Although no scorned, down-trodden artisan
Now reads Tom Paine and quotes the ' Rights of Man,'
Or to conventions sends his delegate
To plot destruction to the tyrant State ;
Although no mob beneath the midnight skies
Now meets to learn the musket-exercise,—
A Revolution, without parallel,
Has just begun, whose end no man can tell.

Lo ! Great Columbia from her copious horn
Pours into Britain streams of beef and corn,
Mutton and meal, and pippins dried and green,
Bacon and butter, cheese and butterine.
The territorial interest stands aghast,
And fain would hope the torrent cannot last.
But every year the flood of food increases ;
Some farmers fail, and thousands curse their leases,

And cling with tooth and nail upon the brink
Of that dread gulf where they at last must sink.
The frightened lairds the swelling current see,
And shout in vain for Reciprocity,
And make immense reductions in the rent,
In many cases thirty odd per cent.
As by the wave of an enchanter's wand,
One half the value has gone out of land,
And that which yesterday none thought could fail,
Sinks from the owner's feet like Sindbad's whale.
Thus, in an unexpected way and strange,
'The whirligig of Time brings its revenge.'

Much I rejoice that millions of the poor
Of wholesome food have now a plenteous store,
And no compassion will my pleasure spoil
For that proud class that owns the British soil,
And who, by reason of ancestral pelf,
Held rank and power and made the laws for self ;
Who drove their decent tenants o'er the deep
To make abundant room for deer and sheep ;
Whose greed for ground was sateless, and whose aim
Was betting, hunting, and preserving game ;
Who lived for sport, yet punished beyond measure
The humble man who tried to share their pleasure,
And had the daring to discharge a cartridge
At hare or pheasant, ptarmigan or partridge.

All hail, Columbia ! here thy produce sell
Till land grows cheap as fish begun to smell ;
Pour in supplies till but the richest soil
Will here reward the farmer for his toil ;
Till cultured lands again are clothed in heath,
And swamps and forests fill the vales beneath ;—
Vile Mammon, in the shape of land, too long
Has here been worshipped by a sordid throng !

SKERRYVORE.

[Written in the Visitors' Book there.]

WHERE far at sea the snow-white breakers roar
Upon that fearful reef called Skerryvore,
A lofty tower, of strong yet graceful form,
Displays a light regardless of the storm,—
From swift destruction keeps the sailor clear,
And in the dark instructs him how to steer ;
To all who plough the deep a friend in need,
It does not ask their country or their creed.
A noble work, which shows in every part
How great is man in intellect and heart !

KILKENNETH—TIREE.

AMIDST a desert waste of drifted sand,
Where the green billows break with mournful sound,
The roofless ruins of a chapel stand,
Surrounded by its little burial-ground,
Whose artless masonry, so rude but strong,
Shews it was built when Christian creeds were young.

And all around the wind, as if in scorn,
Has blown the consecrated sand away,
And from the deepest graves the veil has torn,
Leaving the sleepers in the light of day ;
And shards of urns and snow-white human bones
Lie mingled with the sand and wave-rolled stones.

How strange ! that whilst Life's voyage is so short,
The ghastly wreck should thus so long remain
To be of heartless elements the sport,
Tossed by the wind and pelted by the rain ;
Raised up, like wrecks long sunk in ocean's slime,
To drift abandoned on the tide of Time.

SORABY—TIRÉE.

OUTSIDE the churchyard wall beside a brook,
Like worthless rubbish lie the bones of those
Who, maddened by intolerable woes,
With a ‘bare bodkin’ their own quietus took ;
And mingled with them rest the tiny frames
Of babes condemned to everlasting fire
Because it was their fortune to expire
Before the priest could give them Christian names.
More savage than the brutes is man, for they
No fury feel when breath their victim leaves ;
But endless pain he for the soul conceives,
And wreaks his fiendish hate on senseless clay.

THE STORM.

FROM some far region of the great Atlantic
That winds and waves have made their battle-field,
The foaming billows rush with passion frantic,
Like warriors mighty but compelled to yield,
Dash on the crags and leap aloft like snow,
Or crowd tumultuous in the narrow *gio*.





Up caves and clefts the writhing surges sweep,
But soon return like smoke from some huge gun ;
Ten thousand hollow voices from the deep
Float in the air, all mingled into one
Mysterious song which deeply stirs the heart,
Though none in words its meaning can impart.

Upon a cliff between me and the sky
A fluttering figure battles with the wind ;
Along the coast he casts a raven's eye
In hopes deck-loads or wreckage there to find ;
Large balls of froth ascend from whirling seas,
And fly like feathers on the briny breeze.

Not when the summer sun, as if to mock,
Smiles on the naked hills without a tree,
And glassy ripples lave the sombre rock,
Canst thou the beauty of bleak Shetland see ;
But when the storm across the waves comes sweeping,
Then crags and hills and ocean are in keeping.

-

THE BAGPIPES.

IN summer days when hills are green,
 And sea and sound like silver lie ;
When brooding gulls on crags are seen,
 And terns are wheeling in the sky,
Or darting on their agile wings
To pick the prey the wavelet brings,—
The bagpipes then I blithely blow,
And send the notes o'er hill and voe.

In winter when the days are short,
 And blust'ring winds bring snow and hail ;
When raging waves in caverns snort,
 And billows roll before the gale ;
When balls of foam fly swiftly past
Like sea-fowl on the furious blast,—
The bagpipes then the hours beguile
In Vaila's solitary isle.

All ills that trouble human-kind
 Flew from a box, the bards pretend ;
And Hope alone was left behind,
 To be our comforter and friend.



But Hope is fickle, and indeed
Deserts us at our utmost need ;—
It must, whatever bards have feigned,
Have been the bagpipes that remained.

Oh ! glorious instrument, how can
I sing in fitting words thy praise !
Thou art ‘God’s last, best gift to man,’
A boon and blessing all our days ;
A comrade staunch where’er we be,
At home, abroad, on land or sea ;
A spur to mirth, a salve to woe,
So long as we have breath to blow.

THE SHETLAND SIXERN.

OF vessels of war and the brilliant achievements
That have gained for Great Britain immortal renown ;
Of the number of wives who suffered bereavements
When the Frenchman blew up and the Dutchman went down ;
Of grappling and boarding and fights close and bloody,
When the decks were all gore from the stem to the stern,
Are subjects I feel little fancy to study,
But prefer for a theme the humble sixern.

On the wild coasts of Shetland, so beaten and battered
By billows that roll o'er the ocean afar,
Where the foam-covered headlands, all riven and shattered,
Sustain through the winter a terrible war,
A lug-sail behold, with her mast near the centre,
Afloat on the waves like a sea-mew or tern,
Still dodging the seas when they threaten to enter
And swamp the light hull of the deckless sixern.

Though bold are the crew, for no purpose of slaughter
Have they run from the *voe* to glide o'er the main ;
But to draw cod and ling and tusk from the water,
To feast when they fast the *hidalgos* of Spain.
Yet these hardy fishermen too have their battles
Before what is needful for life they can earn ;
When the wind-driven hail on the sou'wester rattles,
You would pity the crew of the Shetland sixern.

When the fish on the coast assemble in numbers,
All other pursuits must to fishing give place,
And hard are the labours and short are the slumbers
Of the crews who must daily look Death in the face.
Oh ! judge not in haste, you who live by their labours
In comfort and ease, but endeavour to learn,
Ere you censure or smile at the ways of your neighbours,
The hard-working crews of the Shetland sixern.





When their wives you see laden with *kishies* of fuel,
Or tilling the soil with the harrow and spade,
Oh ! say not their husbands are lazy and cruel,
And to save their own sinews their helpmates degrade.
Did you know what they suffer, these weather-beat seamen,
When engaged at their trade, you would clearly discern
That the labour is light that is done by the women
When compared with the toil on board the sixern.

Although in these islands I am a poor stranger,
I venture to take off my bonnet and give
Three cheers for the heroes who, reckless of danger,
Draw food from the ocean that thousands may live.
At the *haaf* and at home may Fortune still bless them,
And blessed be the lot of their wives and their bairns ;
And cursed be the ‘curer’ who tries to oppress them,
The fine hardy crews of the Shetland sixerns.

RIGHTS OF WAY.

INTO an iron hall a man was cast
(You must when boys have read the story often),
Which day by day contracted till at last
It turned a coffin.

So are the public served : by means unfair
They lose their rights to rural paths and by-ways,
And when they want a breath of country air
Must keep to highways.

From hills and glens to which they once were free
They are debarred by private gates and wickets,
Whilst stuck aloft on almost every tree
Are threatening tickets.

The sweet perfume exhaled by woods of pine,
The *coo* of pigeons in their green depths hidden,—
All rural charms that gladden and refine
Are now forbidden.

The placid stream upon whose surface still
The trees as in a mirror are exhibited,
The merry brook that dances down the hill,
Are both prohibited.

Squeezed in on either side by stifling walls,
'Midst dust and dung stirred up by the equestrian,
With all the landscape hid, now cheerless crawls
The poor pedestrian.

Nature he never views save when he flies
In trains whose speed all observation hinders,
And if the glass be down, with blinking eyes,
Afraid of cinders.

If landed folks are thus by legal theft
Allowed our ancient rights of way to plunder,
No room on earth for 'plebs' will soon be left,
But only under.

LINES

WRITTEN ON THE FLY-LEAF OF A GAELIC TESTAMENT.

WHERE crags and scaurs and stony mountains steep
In *h-Iort's** grim bay embrace the raging deep,
And echo back, with softened solemn sound,
The roar of wintry waves that break and bound
Along the concave shore sublime and wild,
This book to me the weary hours beguiled.
At first the page was like the twilight sky,
And all a blank to my untutored eye ;
But by degrees the words like stars began
To twinkle forth, though feeble, few, and wan,
Yet waxing still in number and in size,
Till constellations I could recognise ;

* *h-Iort* is the Gaelic name for St. Kilda. It is pronounced *Herst*. It is apparently derived from the Danish *Iord*, which means the earth or land, from which the Scotch *yerd* has also sprung. St. Kilda, which was formerly called St. Kilder, seems also to be Danish. Kilder signifies ‘the wells,’ water being excellent and abundant there, a feature which would be the most prominent to the Vikings and induce them to name the island from it. The word has been subsequently canonized by some English skipper.









And in my heart I felt no small delight
That Gaelic was not all a starless night.

Oh ! venerable speech, that like a sea
In days remote filled all these kingdoms three !
Though ebbing west, no mark of it remains
Save names of places in our Lowland plains,
Which tell, like shells or sea-weed on the shore,
The Celtic tide was here in days of yore.*

THE WITCH AND THE WABSTER.

THERE was a wabster woned † in Fife,
Wha, when his wark was done,
Thocht it the greatest joy in life
To daunder wi' his gun.

And on a windy autumn nicht,
When a' the fields were bare,

* Since this rhyme was written I have examined our Lowland place-names more carefully, and believe that few or none of them are of Celtic origin ; they seem to be all Norse.

† From the German *Wohnen*, to dwell.

He had the luck, to his delight,
To shoot a bonnie hare.

He seized the mawkin in a crack
And slung it on his gun,
An' wi' it danglin' at his back
Awa' for hame did run.

And as he blithely ran, quo' he :
'This beast my wife will cook,
And it will gi'e the bairns and me
A banquet for an ook.'*

But ere a hundred ells he went
He slackened in his pace,
And staggered on with body bent
And sweat upon his face.

'What hellish cantrip's this!' quo' he,
Wi' open een and mou';
'The hare I shot has turned to lead,
Or to a calf or coo.'

He glowered around wi' eerie awe
To try and solve the puzzle,

* Danish *Uge*, a week.

When, Lord ! a neebour's wife he saw
Sit grinnin' on the muzzle !

He shook her aff in wrath and dread,
And at her cursed and swore ;
And to Sanct Andro's toun he gaed,
Whilst she limped on before.

The people there were weel aware
She lang had served the deevil,
And in the shape o' cat and hare
Had wrocht them muckle evil.

And now the tale frae ilka lip
Gaed circling round the spot,
That she was crippled on the hip,
Whar mawkin had been shot.

Unto the kirk the folk in fear
This witch carline did take ;
The Session found her guilt was clear,
And brunt her at the stake.

PEACE ON EARTH :

OR,

THE FIRST ATLANTIC CABLE.

WHEN the telegraphic rope
From the ships had safely run,
And the nations full of hope
Thought the worlds were linked in one,

And that Britain and the States,
By this wonder-working cable,
Would converse and hold debates
Like two friends across a table—

Braggart shouts and loud hoorays
Shook the city of New York,
And the Yankees claimed the praise
For the great and glorious work.

But their courteous President,
With a ready wit and pen,
To our Queen this message sent :
‘ Peace on earth—goodwill to men ! ’

Through the deep on wings of fire
Came the message to our shore,
And the horror-stricken wire
Never breathed a whisper more.

Soon the fiercest war began
(‘Peace on earth !’—delusive trust !)
Ever fought by brawling man
On the globe’s ensanguined crust.

Where deep hate and stubborn pride,
And revenge as deep and bold,
Spurred the foe on either side,
As they did in days of old.

‘Peace on earth’ ’tis well to seek,
Though we cannot keep it long ;
Whilst the earth endures, the weak
Must be mastered by the strong.

SCIENTIFIC MACHINERY.

'MAN is by birth somewhat of an owl. And now the genius of mechanism smothers him worse than any nightmare did ; till the soul is nigh choked out of him, and only a kind of digestive, mechanic life remains. In Earth and in Heaven he can see nothing but mechanism.'—'Sartor Resartus.'

THE time has been when every field
That would a crop of knowledge yield
Was free to any reapers ;
But every plot, however small,
Is now enclosed with hedge or wall,
And watched by jealous keepers.

The weather, with its rain and sleet,
Its winter cold and summer heat,
And winds in great variety ;
The ocean, with its tides and streams,
And every fish that in it swims,
Belong to some Society :

The savage crags so high and steep,
That front and fight the stormy deep,
 Where flock the gulls and gannets ;—
Yea, some pretend to have the right
Exclusive to the vault of night,
 With all its stars and planets.

No traveller can now explore
An unknown country as of yore,
 Heaven-led and self-reliant,
But some small scientific sect
Must patronise him and direct,
 Or damn him if defiant.

Indeed no man need journey far
To get the name of traveller,
 Or any service render ;
For now diplomas he can get
Although upon a chair he sit
 With feet upon the fender.

If you but venture to declare
That Scottish folk take little care
 Of spots their bards lived near once,
The President of Burns' Club
Steps forth to contradict and snub
 You for your interference.

And haply should you wish to trace
The footprints of a vanished race

In prehistoric ages,
Your first proceeding is to seek
The kind permission of some clique
Of self-elected sages.

Though arrogant in look and word,
The few who lead the simple herd
Distrust their own ability ;
And, lacking brains to win respect,
They one as President elect
Amongst our old nobility.

The Daily Press they also court
For leave to write their own report,
And print exaggerations ;
And by such crafty means they try
To throw dust in the public eye,
And raise their reputations.

Three capitals behind your name
Is but a paltry kind of fame,
Admired by ninnies merely ;
Yet some, these letters to display,
To antiquarian ‘Rings’ will pay
A pound or guinea yearly.

Like water-flies with feeble wings,
That skim the surface of the springs,

Are these organisations ;

Or like the urchins at a fair,
That ride on hobbies in the air,

With profitless gyrations :

Around, around, around they go,
And think they make a glorious show

Upon their timber asses ;

Whilst their huge *organ*, as they wheel,
Performs a kind of tuneless reel,

To gull the gaping masses.

To make, as with a witch's rod,
The buried past rise from the sod,

And tell its wondrous story

Of how men lived, and toiled, and fought,
In days appallingly remote—

In ages old and hoary,—

Is not a feat that can be done
By busy gentlemen who run

To spend their brief vacations

In districts where, below the ground,
The marks of ancient man abound,

Or by Associations.

The most prefer to stop at home,
And see the relics when they come
From unsuspecting donors ;
And in the room to take their seat,
Where once a month the members meet
To share their spurious honours.

A mental feast they sometimes give,
Which helps the cooks at least to live,—
Cooks of the highest status,—
To which the public, if they will,
Are free to come and sup their fill
Of watery broth, but gratis.

Stale scraps and bones that have before
Been boiled a hundred times or more
Are thrown into the pot again,
Together with a pea or two,
Or barley corn that may be new,
And ladled out when hot again.

And then the grandee in the chair
Will rise and praise the sumptuous fare
To which they have been treated ;
'A richer pot of broth,' he says,
'He never tasted all his days,
No cook on earth could beat it.'

Away with selfish ‘Rings,’ I say;
Away with cliques that block the way;
 Away with snobbish tyrants!
The peaks of Science and of Art
Should not be closed in any part,
 But free to all aspirants.

LINES

ON A COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE TOBACCO PIPES.

BEHOLD these ancient relics found
In river bed and upper ground;
And as the precious lot you scan
Think what a fleeting shade is man,
Since these, the weakest wares he makes,
Things that a fall or fillip breaks,
Are still extant—some perfect still
As when they left the maker’s kiln—
Whilst those of less enduring clay,
Who made and puffed, have passed away;
Have shuffled off this mortal coil,
And mouldered into shapeless soil;
Or, like the smoke that soothed their care,
Have vanished into viewless air.

THE SPIDER.

IN many islands of our Scottish seas,
In Shetland here and in the Hebrides,
The 'Merchant,' like a spider, spins his net,
And binds the people down to it with debt.
Once in his toils they never can get free,
And soon resign the hope of liberty ;
And whilst with ruthless claws to them he clings,
They buzz his praise with sycophantic wings.

Behold the creature when he first began :
Small as a pea along the lines he ran,
Or in some shady corner sat obscure,
Scorned by the rich, undreaded by the poor.
But after feeding for a time on flies,
He grows a monster of gigantic size.
From isle to isle his fearful web extends,
And to his aid come troops of fawning friends,
And every institution of the State
Is made a tool to help him to be great.
The Law hood-winks the public or keeps dumb ;
The Postal Service rests beneath his thumb ;
His servant in the office acts as clerk,
And every note received or sent can mark ;

The Mail he carries in his sloop, and hence
Transports his goods at Government expense ;
The Telegraphic Service he obtains,
Or by a loop the information gains
Which rival merchants as a secret wire
Of wares they have to vend or may require.

Physic assists him, and Religion too :
The Preacher smirks to see him in his pew,
And begs him at soirees to take the chair
And launch the entertainment with a prayer,
Or ask a blessing ere the flock departs,
Although a hundred curse him in their hearts ;
But what they think in private he despises,
So long as business he monopolises.

Although the smaller insects are his prey,
He catches all the large that come his way.
The big blue-bottle that we call the laird
He tries by every wile to get ensnared ;
Thread after thread around his wings are cast,
Until the victim is secured at last.
By loans and bonds, as factor or trustee,
The spider drags him on to bankruptcy ;
Then springs upon him with a mocking grin,
Sucks out his blood, and leaves an empty skin.

Complaints about the beast are sometimes sent,
And get attention from the Government ;
Commissions are appointed to go round
Amongst the islands till the truth be found,
And special steamers for their use are chartered,
Or in gun-boats or tenders they are quartered.
Inspectors are directed to inspect,
And all report the rumours are correct,
And that in every isle at which they called
A bloated spider fettered and appalled,
And gagged and batten'd on the poor community,
As could be done at present with impunity.

A measure into Parliament is brought,
Which costs the maker 'meikle' time and thought ;
A kind of broom, with long and supple handle,
Designed from every nook to sweep the scandal,
And drive the reptiles from their noxious labours,
That they no longer may entrap their neighbours.
And weeks are spent in captious criticism,
In motions and amendments, till the besom,
Before the legislative workshop it has left,
Has been reduced to little but the heft,
And it a useless stump, by far too short
To reach the spiders and destroy their sport ;
And then the broom-stick (as the Truck Act known)
Is with contempt into a corner thrown.

TO MISS RANOLINA STEWART,

ON HER SEVENTEENTH BIRTHDAY.

HOW rapid is the flight of Time ! it seems
As if but days and not long years had fled
Since she upon my back, in spite of screams
And kicks, I carried to her infant bed.

For on the rug she sat before the fire
With heavy eyes that would not open keep,
And, though her aunt beseeched, would not retire
To rest her little weary frame in sleep.

And now a blooming maiden she has grown,
In spirit gentle, innocent, and kind,
Sweet as a rosebud that is newly blown,
And with a gifted and accomplished mind.

The future lies before her in a haze
Of golden light which hides its limit small ;
To her it seems an endless length of days
That will be spent in peace and pleasure all.

Vain hopes of youth which cannot be fulfilled,
Vain hopes that are but castles in the air ;
Yet of such blessings as the world can yield
May Ranolina have an ample share !

VAILA.

'THE rain it raineth every day,'
Varied by gales with hail and spray,—
Small pleasure now it is to stray
Upon the cliffs of Vaila.

Yet let me paint in homely style
A picture of this little isle,—
In length and breadth about a mile,
Yet large enough, is Vaila.

The South and West confront the deep,
And there the crags are high and steep,
Yet broken billows often leap
Above the rocks of Vaila.

And when the wintry tempests blow
The sea breaks on the stacks like snow,

And yeasty froth fills every *gio*
Around the coast of Vaila.

Then spin-drift mingles with the air,
And all the ground is wet and bare,
And quadrupeds but poorly fare
For many months in Vaila.

The shaggy ponies, lean and weak,
The pebbly beach for sea-weed seek,
And crunching tangles in their cheek
Support their lives in Vaila.

Within a manor house I dwell,
Erected, as escutcheons tell,
Long since by one Sir John Mitchell,
And called the Ha' in Vaila.

The population is but small,
And numbers twenty-two in all ;
One man and many maids are tall,
And all are strong in Vaila.

Although the men can use the spade,
And help with it to earn their bread,
Yet fishing is the favourite trade
When weather suits in Vaila.

But weather does not always suit,
And then they patch or sole a boot,
Or make a *rivlin* for their foot,
 Or mend their lines in Vaila.

But when the fish are to be caught,
Then bolder men are not afloat
Than those who launch a six-oared boat
 And dash to sea from Vaila.

Though winds be strong and waves be high,
Across the rolling tide they fly,
Whilst calm, but watchful, is the eye
 Of every man from Vaila.

They luff her up, or keep away,
And with the raging surges play,
Whilst o'er the gunwale pours the spray,
 But scares no man from Vaila.

And when they run before the gale
They watch the gusts and dip the sail,
And with a wooden shovel bail
 The boats that go from Vaila.

In Spring, when fish approach to spawn
And lines must from the deep be drawn,

The crews arise before the dawn
And hurry off from Vaila.

Through rain or sleet they leave the shore,
And toss at sea ten hours or more ;
Their rest is short, their labour sore,
But none complains in Vaila.

Death on a billow-top may stand,
With dart in his uplifted hand,
But cannot daunt the hardy band
That work the boats of Vaila.

None here a doctor need employ,
For all the best of health enjoy ;
And Christie Thomson like a boy
Enjoys his food in Vaila.

Although eight years beyond fourscore *
He still has strength to pull an oar,
And labours hard upon the shore
With spade and flail in Vaila.

In Foula he was born and bred,
And though no books he ever read

* This was written in 1884, and Christopher Thomson is still alive and is now ninety-two years of age, and unaltered in habits or appearance.

He has more knowledge in his head
Than any man in Vaila.

The knots in wood engage his mind,
And which will raise up gales of wind
If built in vessels he can find
And show the men of Vaila.

He also has the gift or knack,
When *luck* has left a boat or smack,
By magic arts to bring it back,
Though few believe in Vaila.

No Sabbath bell the island reaches,
No preacher ever comes and preaches ;
Some shift their shirts and some their breeches
To mark the day in Vaila.

I've lived in places in my time
Where grew the orange and the lime,
But I prefer the bracing clime
And breezy cliffs of Vaila.

Here let me live, and when I die
Below the sea-pinks let me lie,
Where billows break and sea-fowl cry
Upon the crags of Vaila.

MORE LIGHT!

I ENVY not the rich and great ;
I want no mansion or estate,
No dainty food or costly wine,
No knaves to tend me when I dine,
No cook from France to dress my fare,
No coach to let me take the air ;
I want no horses and no hounds,
No fishing streams or shooting grounds ;
I care not for a cushioned pew
In front of all the vulgar crew,
Where I might take mine ease and nod,
The highest in the house of God :
All such would be a bore to me.
A humble cottage by the sea
Is all that I desire or need,—
A sheltered box in which to read
When howling blasts with wind and rain
In winter scourge the window-pane.
And yet one luxury I grant
The rich possess I often want :

I covet their ancestral store
Of old and miscellaneous lore ;
Their books that may have stood for ages
Upon the shelves with unread pages ;
And even books I covet not
If but their contents could be got.

TIREE.

ONE of the islands
In the Western Highlands
Whose name is spelt, but not pronounced, Tiree,
Contains a station
For communication
With Skerryvore, which stands far off at sea.

A row of houses
For the keepers' spouses
And signal-tower appear on grassy heights ;
A dock and warerooms,
And house with spare rooms,
Belonging to the Board of Northern Lights.





Here yachtsmen cruising
Find it amusing
To drop their anchors in the briny deep ;
To disembark here,
And in the Park here
Through the long telescope to take a peep.

In this location
A habitation
Was vacant, and I took it for a year,
With the intention,
As I may mention,
Of making antiquarian surveys here.

The ruins of chapels
Are thick as apples,
And sculptured stones are hid by grass and docks ;
Cup-marks on boulders
Amaze beholders,
And there are thousands on the wave-washed rocks.

On elevations
Fortifications
Of ancient date upon the coast abound ;
And urns or basins,
With zig-zag tracin's,
In cists below the sand are often found.

But every wonder,
Above and under,
Pertaining to the past no pen could state ;
So of the present,
Though not so pleasant,
Some striking features I will indicate.

There's not a hotel
Where you a bottle
Of porter or a glass of grog can get ;
All is teetotal,
Except your throttle
On board a screw at anchor you can wet.

This tempts the bearers
To become swearers,
Who march with corpses to the burial place ;
For miles they often
Convey the coffin,
And in their thirsty choler curse his Grace.

As to the question
About congestion,
My real opinion I will not reveal ;
For none but plotters
Will pity cottars,
And to espouse their cause is not genteel.

All leading journals
That are diurnals
The Gael to Manitoba would transport ;
To please the gentry
They'd clear the country,
And leave the land for Cheviot sheep and sport.

Big flocks and fleeces
The rent increases,
And cash is of more consequence than men ;
Though if the latter
Abroad you scatter
No Government can call them back again.

There's no occasion
For agitation
Where thousands are in want of daily bread ;
The pangs of hunger
Excite their anger,
And make them of the law have little dread.

And then the rabble
Are unreasonable,
And at Economy will never look ;
They think Creation
To every station
Belongs as well as to a lord or duke.

That heartless swindling
(My wrath is kindling !)
Called *Truck* should not be suffered to endure :
That legal knavery
Which holds in slavery
And grinds the noses of the helpless poor.

Men without dinners
Are fearful sinners,
And think more of their stomachs than their souls ;
And tracts, when sent them,
Do not content them
When they are destitute of meal and coals.

In huts where dearth is,
And on the hearth is
No fire to cook potatoes, small and few,
One sees, and with a laugh,
A pious lithograph,
Presented by some Christian well-to-do.

Would any donor
Make me the owner
Of that flat isle, the farms I would divide ;
And inanition
And all sedition
Without coercion would at once subside.

All who were willing
To earn a shilling
Should have at moderate rents their plots of ground ;
Adults no longer
Would suffer hunger,
And children's cheeks would grow both red and round.

The land is level,
And the people civil,
The Gaelic is the tongue of all but few :
When any meet you
They often greet you
With : '*Là maith dhuibh—tha side blath an diugh.*'

Songs are the fashion,
The pipes a passion,
Though very few that instrument possess ;
For hours they listen,
With eyes that glisten,
Forgetful for a time of their distress.

Few cliffs the coast of
Tiree can boast of,
Yet there is beauty in the spacious bays,
When light green ocean
With gentle motion
Upon the golden sand in summer plays.

And in hot weather,
When grouped together,
The long-horned cattle stand when tired of grass,
Dull and dejected,
With forms reflected
In briny pools as in a looking-glass.

And piles of vapour
Of rounded shape, or
Piles upon piles adorn the deep blue sky,
Massive and hoary,
Of passing glory,
Whose shadows in the shallows also lie.

When the sea slumbers,
And isles in numbers
Upon its rim appear to float in air,
They look so dream-like
They do not seem like
Parts of a world so full of vulgar care.

But I must end now
What I have penned now,
Because I have no more about Tiree to state ;
And to that *eilean*,
With friendly feelin',
I here will wish a hearty *beannachd leat*.

IN MEMORY

OF THE LATE DR. JAMES HASTIE STODDART, EDITOR OF THE
‘GLASGOW HERALD.’

ALTHOUGH his face I never chanced to see,
And his most earnest efforts never read,
I feel no little grief that he is dead,
For he in time of need befriended me.

In lonely isles I long had dwelt alone,
And searched on moor, on hill-top, and in glen,
For scattered footprints of primeval men
Who flourished in the hoary age of stone.

And when the day was fair I laboured hard
With spade and crow in cairns of massive blocks,
And looked for cups on boulders and on rocks ;
But spiteful sniffs and sneers were my reward.

And yet my labour was not all in vain :
For in the work itself I took delight,
And though my courage sunk at times, the sight
Of some old relic buoyed it up again.

Such was my state when, like a voice from Heaven,
 A letter came from him who now is dead :
‘ Write what you see and I will ‘print,’ he said ;
And help to help myself was thereby given.

When I his faith and friendliness forgot,
 May God to me a crust of bread deny ;
 And in a Pictish castle let me die,
And none be near my burning lips to wet !

APRIL 1888.





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